

Associated Press

House Moves to Strip Food Warning Labels

By LIBBY QUAID , 03.08.2006, 07:26 PM

The House moved closer Wednesday to stripping many warnings from food labels, potentially affecting alerts about arsenic in bottled water, lead in candy and mercury in fish, among others.

Pushed by food companies seeking uniform labels across state lines, the bill would prevent states from adding food warnings that go beyond federal law. States could petition the Food and Drug Administration to add extra warnings, under the bill.

In California, white signs with "WARNING" in red letters tells grocery shoppers about high mercury levels in certain fish. Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., displayed the placard during debate Wednesday on the House floor.

"If this becomes law, it's going to be buried on a website at the FDA," Eshoo said. "This is not about consumers. This is about special interests."

California is a primary target of the legislation. There, the voter-passed Proposition 65 requires companies to warn the public of potentially dangerous toxins in food. California has filed lawsuits seeking an array of warnings, including the mercury content of canned tuna and the presence of lead in Mexican candy.

Nationwide, as many as 200 state laws or regulations could be affected, according to the Congressional Budget Office. They include warnings about allergy-causing sulfites, lead and alcohol in candy and many others.

There is widespread opposition among state officials. Attorneys general in 39 states are opposed, as are the National Conference of State Legislature and the associations of state food and drug officials and state agriculture departments.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, about 200 state laws would be affected. The government would spend at least \$100 million to answer petitions for tougher state rules, CBO said.

The bill's supporters argue that consumers deserve the same warnings in all 50 states. The bill would allow a state to seek a nationwide warning from FDA.

"We ought to do it in all 50 states," said Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga. "Chicken grown in Louisiana is going to end up on a plate in Michigan."

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